

**Judicial  
Circuit Court  
Guardian Ad Litem**

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*Seminole County*

**Mission**

To advocate for the best interest of abused, neglected or abandoned children in judicial proceedings. The program recruits, trains, and supervises volunteers to represent the best interest of children in civil and criminal cases.

**Business Strategy**

The Seminole County Guardian Ad Litem Program began in 1980 as part of a pilot project to test the effectiveness of lay citizens as advocates for abused and neglected children. It developed as a result of a federal mandate known as the Child Abuse and Treatment Act. This mandate was later codified in Florida Statutes, most specifically, F.S. 39.822. This statute requires the appointment of a Guardian Ad Litem for any child suspected of being abused or neglected in any criminal or civil proceeding. Further, F.L. 61.041, provides for the appointment of a Guardian Ad Litem in an action for dissolution of marriage, or modification, if the Court finds it is in the best interest of the child.

The volunteer Guardian Ad Litem is the only independent advocate for the child and has the responsibility for advancing what is in the best interest of the child. Guardians are required to gather information, act as a monitor, assure the child's protection, and finally make written and oral reports to the Court containing information and recommendations until the court terminates jurisdiction.

Volunteers are trained, screened and supervised by a full time professional staff. Twenty-four hours of pre-service training is provided five times a year to maintain an incoming flow of available volunteer advocates. In-service training sessions are held a minimum of ten times per year.

**Objectives**

Maintain or increase the number of volunteers; assure quality legal representation.

Provide for increased representation of child victims in delinquency and criminal proceedings to meet the statutory mandate.

**Performance Measures**

	<u>FY 00/01 Actual</u>	<u>FY 01/02 Estimated</u>	<u>FY 02/03 Goal</u>
Average daily caseload	310	301	292
Volunteer hours	135,502	140,000	139,700
Children represented	892	933	920

